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# “THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN”

## AN ADDRESS

BY

JOHN WARNOCK ECHOLS

Member of the Bar of the U. S. Supreme Court  
and the Supreme Courts of the District  
of Columbia, Virginia, Georgia  
and Pennsylvania

Before the Historical Society of Fairfax County  
at Fairfax, Virginia, on the Anniversary  
of Washington's Birthday  
February 22, 1917

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WASHINGTON, D. C.  
PRESS OF JUDD & DETWEILER, INC.  
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## “THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN.”

### MEMBERS OF THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF FAIRFAX COUNTY AND GUESTS:

When, at a meeting recently of the executive committee of this society, I was invited to be one of the speakers at this annual assembly on the anniversary of Washington's birthday, I was immediately informed by my steering committee of one that it was not expected that I should consume more than ten minutes in expanding my views; on the supposition, no doubt, that I would have either exhausted my subject or my audience in that length of time: which reminds me of an incident that occurred in Alexandria in the days now long since gone by. During the early days of September, 1873, I was a guest of friends there, and on a Sunday morning accompanied a young girl friend to the Presbyterian Church, the pastor of which was the venerable Dr. Bullock, and her father one of the elders. After the services, in which Dr. Bullock preached a sermon considerably over an hour in length, he accepted an invitation from the aforesaid elder, Mr. Stuart, to accompany us to Mr. Stuart's home to dinner. While consuming the viands on the well-spread table, the talk turned on the exhausting heat of the day, and Dr. Bullock said to me: "I suppose, young man,

coming from the far South, the heat does not affect you as it does us who live in the more temperate zone." "Well, Doctor," I replied, "the heat in church did not exhaust me as much as your long sermon." After a laugh around the table, in which the dear old Doctor heartily joined, he said: "It was a little longer than usual today, I'll admit, but I find it impossible to ever fully develop my text in less than an hour." "That may be, Doctor," I impulsively shot back, "but I feel sure your congregation think you could fully develop it in less than half that time." After another laugh at his expense, he rose equal to the occasion by telling an anecdote of the Scotch parson who preached a sermon over two hours in length and was, at the close of the services, approached by one of his elders, who said: "I ken ye'er vera tired wi' such a lang serma'!" "Weel, mon, somewha' sae, but it wad hae doon ye gude to sae hoo tired me congregation war'!" Later on that evening my girl friend said, "We girls were so glad you dropped the Doctor so forcible a hint we could have kissed you." They didn't, though, I am sorry to confess; it was only a threat.

The moral is, if "brevity is the soul of wit" and you can't be witty, you can at least, be brief; and I judge that was in the mind of my steering committee in limiting me to ten minutes. So, if I should overstep the injunction, I will hope that if you can't be altogether patient, you will be as patient as you can.

The query in my mind today, and has been ever

since the founding of this society, is, What should be its true plans and purposes? Is its object merely to touch upon and further illustrate the few high points in this country's history; to further laud those whose names are already written high on the walls of fame; or to deeper dig and bring to light and honorable mention those staunch foundations on which the more polished superstructure of fame has been erected?

“Where lies the justice of the case; I always dig deep for that,” once said Justice Lumpkin, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia. Where lies the true prosperity of any country? Should we not always dig deep for that? Unhesitatingly the answer comes down the ages, “It is *the man behind the gun.*” “Give me the men,” said Napoleon, “and I will make the generals!” well knowing that without the men behind the guns, the greatest general the world has ever known would be of no greater force in war than a gun without the cartridge—well appearing, perhaps, and finely finished, but useless. Therefore, while it may seem antipodal and even antagonistic to denominate the subject given me for discussion, viz., “The great men of Fairfax,” as “the man behind the gun,” in truth and in reality the terms are, or should be, synonymous. The motto of the Prince of Wales, “Ich dien” (I serve) fully illustrates my point; for only they who have truly served are truly fit to rule; or, better still, to form the foundations and raise the superstructure of

individual and national prosperity—whether it be in the armed camp or navy, or in the more honorable and peaceful pursuits of industry and mental and moral development. Greatness and honor, as defined by the masses of men, are only too often ephemeral; the "Hail, Master," of today becomes the "Crucify Him" of the morrow. Only too often the applause of the groundlings makes the judicious grieve; the approval of the judicious befogged by the malice of the masses. So that it is oftentimes only when the motto of the ancients, "Speak only well of the dead," brings to the front our better natures that foibles are forgotten, mistakes ignored, and all are alike willing to remember and revere the greater good which so far eclipsed the ills to which flesh is always prone and never entirely overcomes.

This county of Fairfax furnishes many illustrious examples of the truth of my statement and of the further fact that it is to the man behind the gun that leadership is mostly, if not altogether, indebted. Both Washington and Lee many times "endured the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," not from lack of merit on their part, but from lack of tried and true men behind the guns to properly execute their well-laid plans; and thus exemplified the aphorism of Burns, that "schemes o' mice and men aft gang a'glee." During all the years of the Revolution and his terms of office as President, Washington was abused in the public press and by thousands of politicians

and unprincipled partisans as never a man in American public life had e'er been abused before. It has been written of him that "a second time Washington consented to hold the reins of power; and again, as in the Revolution, he felt the bitterness of unpopularity." All the honor he had gained could not protect him from the hasty wrath of a people dissatisfied (just as at present with President Wilson) with his policy toward England. Because he was striving for peace (again like Wilson), he was roundly abused in terms scarcely suited to a "Nero, a notorious pickpocket, or even a common defaulter!" It saddened but did not change him. He was only the more unwilling to serve another term, and, when his eight years of civil service ended, he said farewell to the people he had served through a generation. He gave them the simple advice that they most needed. Tears coursed down his cheeks as he turned for the last time from the throng that had listened to him in love and sorrow. Three years he lingered in retirement at Mount Vernon and then died, December 14, 1799, as he had wished to live, "amid the mild concerns of ordinary life." Once again a man behind the gun!

And it was only after his passing from scenes terrestrial to life celestial and the sublime funeral oration by Henry Lee before both houses of Congress, a little later, in which occurred that famous phrase that has ever since been ringing round the world, "first in war, first in peace, and first in the

hearts of his countrymen," that full justice has been done his life's work and struggle for the good of mankind.

And what of Lee? Was his life one round of continued success, unmarred by criticism and censure? Ah, no! He, too, "endured the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," the poison-tipped tongue of slander, and the torture of unmerited rebuke. The latter part of July, 1861, after the Confederate forces in Western (now West) Virginia had met repeated defeats at Philippi, Rich Mountain, Carrick's Ford, Scarey Creek, and Romney, General Lee was assigned to the command of all Confederate forces in Western Virginia; but, owing to a lack of cohesion and disinterestedness of his division commanders and as the result of the repeated defeats whereby the men behind the guns had become discouraged and demoralized, the campaign proved a failure; and, as one result, as one of his biographers states, "Lee was greatly disappointed and deeply mortified at his failure, and was under a cloud from which he did not emerge till after he had succeeded to the command of the Army of Northern Virginia, in June, 1862."

That last clause is untrue. He did emerge several months before then; but only after a most galling, most soul-sickening, experience. Many newspapers and politicians of the South took him to task as being responsible for the failure of the West Virginia campaign; and some newspapers

of South Carolina and Georgia even accused him of lukewarmness and disloyalty to the Confederate cause, basing their attacks upon a letter he wrote to his sister shortly after he resigned from the U. S. Army, in which he said: "We are now in a state of war which will yield to nothing. The whole South is in a state of revolution into which Virginia, after a long struggle, has been drawn; and though I recognize no necessity for this state of things, and would have forbore and placated to the end for redress of grievances, real or supposed, yet in my own person I had to meet the question whether I should take part against my native State. With all my devotion to the Union, and the feeling of loyalty and duty of an American citizen, I have not been able to make up my mind to raise my hand against my relatives, my children, my home. I have therefore resigned my commission in the army, and, save in defense of my native State—with the sincere hope that my poor services may never be needed—I hope I may never be called upon to draw my sword."

But now the side of the cloud's silver lining comes to view; for every cloud has its silver lining, if only we can view it from the side the sun shines on! Sometimes we alone can reach the cloud's sunny side; oftentimes we need the aid of helpful hearts and hands. And at this juncture in the life of Lee, leading men of South Carolina and Georgia importuned President Davis to assign General Lee to take charge of the defenses of the

coasts of those States. Their wishes were complied with, and in October, 1861, he took command, and soon, by his masterly skill and executive ability, planned and partially constructed so marvelous a line of coast defenses as to withstand all assaults until nearly the close of the war.

The cloud's silver lining then appeared. His devotion to duty, his great ability, his patience and silence under fire of criticism and slander, aroused universal applause throughout the South, silenced his detractors, and soon they became conscience-stricken; both in the news and editorial columns of many papers apologies appeared; and never after, throughout the South, was a line printed or a word uttered disloyal to his life or memory, save by a few disgruntled subordinates seeking by censure to cover their own mistakes or insubordinations. And when, in January, 1862, he became President Davis' military adviser and, later on, was assigned to the command of the Army of Northern Virginia, he went "*sans peur et sans reproche*," and never by word or deed was his knighthood sullied or his sword ignobly stained.

Thus far to show how leaders suffered by lack of loyal men and true behind the guns in military and civil affairs; in action and in discretion; by reason of incompetency or, worse, by the tongue of slander and the croakings of cravens.

But how about the loyal men and true behind the guns? Have we awarded them the meed of praise their loyalty, their devotion to duty, their share

of victory, deserved? Is it not too often true that we have praised the leaders, but have failed to praise the led? Take, for illustration, a recent occurrence. Only a few weeks ago a great admiral passed across the bar, and the people, as one man, joined to do honor to his memory, and everywhere he was acclaimed the victor at, and the hero of, Manila. He was, indeed, a victor at, and a hero of, Manila; but, in the last analysis which history should award to fame, he was only one of the many who were victors at, and heroes of, Manila. He well fulfilled his part, but so did all his men who fought that battle of the fleets. It was not Dewey, but the men behind the guns, who really won that fight—men who for months and years, poorly paid and suffering, even in times of peace, hardships unknown to their commanders, by persistent practice of the art of gunnery, backed by loyalty and courage, so aimed and shot as to, in a few short hours, completely demolish the Spanish fleet—a fleet commanded by men of tried courage and ability, but lacking in the one great essential of successful warfare—trained, tried, and true men behind the guns.

How many of us ever heard the name of Dewey until his "You may fire when ready, Gridley," electrified the Nation?

And who ever before, and scarcely ever since, heard the name of Gridley? And yet, he was Dewey's chief executive officer, in command of the flag-ship and, in the conning-tower, directed the

movements of our fleet all through the battle. In less than a month after that battle, while en route home on sick-leave, his sickness being largely attributed to concussion caused by shot or shots hitting the conning-tower in which he was directing the battle, he died at Kobe, Japan; and only a short account of his death and burial in the newspapers at the time, and still fewer lines in the encyclopedias written since, round out the record of a useful life and of a heroism as lofty, as that of his superior officer. And as for the men behind the guns in that eventful battle, who now recalls, or ever recalled, their deeds of bravery, save the few connected by ties of blood or of affinity?

Of the battle of the fleets off Santiago the same must be said. Admiral Sampson was seventy miles away when that battle was begun; and Admiral Schley's famous loop-the-loop during the conflict called for a court of inquiry to decide whether his act was one of strategy or cowardice. He was acquitted, but in an address years after, before a fraternal society in Washington, he gave the honor of that battle to the men behind the guns, and it was his tribute in that address which has led me to adopt that tribute as the key-note of these remarks.

Another instance in lighter vein. Shortly before that battle of the fleets, in an impotent attempt to bottle up the Spanish fleet in the harbor of Santiago, volunteers were called for to take a collier-ship and so sink it across the harbor's

entrance as to block the channel. Richmond Pearson Hobson and seven others volunteered, performed alike the required act of heroism, afterwards attempted their escape in boats, were captured and held as prisoners in a Spanish fortress for a month. All have heard of Hobson! According to newspaper accounts and of eye-witnesses (envious, no doubt!), he kissed his way, or was kissed, by sweet-sixteens and fair-fat-and-forties, clear across the continent; was kissed to Congress, where he made an ass of himself, occasionally, as the average congressman is so apt to do. All of which was very nice for Hobson, but what of the other seven? They, too, doubtless were kissed, but even that act of heroism has never been recorded, and their names have simply sunk into the ocean of oblivion in company with the other men behind the guns who fought and won the battles of Manila and Santiago.

Is this right? Is it just? While we would not tear off one leaf from the garlands of laurel crowning the brows of all those whose acts of leadership and bravery the world delights to honor, is it not our duty, our privilege, to record, if not as individuals, at least in groups, the heroic deeds of the men behind the guns? To change hero-worship to heroes-worship; from the singular to the plural number? Instead of recording that Dewey won the battle of Manila, and Sampson or Schley the battle of Santiago; that Hobson sank the collier in the harbor of Santiago, put it thus: Dewey's

fleet won the battle of Manila, Sampson's and Schley's fleet that of Santiago, and Hobson and his men performed an act of heroism in the harbor of Santiago? Thus all will be alike honored and patriotism increased without doing less honor to the leaders, but more to the led; and when the country calls for men, whether for defense or to fill each and every avocation of civil life, response will come more readily and heartily when all alike feel sure their work and sacrifices will be appreciated, whether fighting for their country or aiding in its development. And then, too, the appreciation of the acts of heroism of the many, instead of hero-worship of the individual, will lessen, if not entirely prevent, a danger always menacing organized society; for, while hero-worship of the dead is never to be deplored, hero-worship of the living is a peril to republican forms of government. Every republic in the past has fallen through its baleful effects. Three centuries before the Christian era Greece, after long periods of suffering brought about by hero-worship, enacted the law that, when voted affirmatively by the people, any one performing an act ascribed as heroic should be banished for a period of ten years, in order to prevent that hero from grasping the reins of government and becoming a tyrant. And so long as Greece maintained that law, the republic stood; and only when it was abrogated did tyranny once again prevail. France twice lost her republican form of government through hero-worship of

the Napoleons; and the continued revolutions, insurrections and brigandage in Mexico, many of the Latin countries of South America, Cuba and the West India Islands generally, arise from the same cause. And only a liberty-loving Washington, who firmly believed in a "government of the people, by the people and for the people," prevented this Nation from becoming a monarchy instead of a republic at the close of the Revolutionary War. As set forth by one of his biographers, "Washington's service to his country was not to end with Yorktown. As he had been 'first in war,' because he was most fitted, so his unique character and pre-eminent place in American hearts fated him to become 'first in peace.'" His last successes had still more firmly fixed his power among the people. Their thoughts and imaginations were filled with him. With a discontented and insubordinate army still in arms and with no real government in existence, Washington was the only source of authority and law that had anything more than a local influence. The weak Union might have lost all cohesion, and America (just as in Mexico today) might have degenerated into a number of petty, feeble, and hostile States. Worse than that, the hopes for an American republic might have been indefinitely delayed, for, in the despair which settled upon many, there seemed but one escape from the political storm that threatened—they would make Washington king! In the army this plan was gravely con-

sidered, but, when broached to Washington, he expressed himself as pained that such ideas existed in the army. "I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which seems to me big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country." To nobody could such a thought be more disagreeable, he declared earnestly. "Let me conjure you, if you have any regard for your country, concern for yourselves, or respect for me, to banish these thoughts from your mind."

And when, during the awful, unfortunate, unnecessary, clash of arms between the States of this Union, the other grand example I have chosen to illustrate my subject was approached by General Toombs, of Georgia, and his consent solicited to aid in changing the form of the Confederacy to that of a monarchy, giving as a reason that slavery was an autocratic form of government, the control of the many by the few, and could never long exist within a democracy, General Lee nobly replied, "then so much the worse for slavery, and before I ever consent to such a change, I'll sheathe my sword never to draw it again save in defense of my native State against such an intolerable proposition." This last statement has never, to my knowledge, been recorded in history, but it is nevertheless a fact, told me by General Toombs himself, and should be recorded as one other of the noble utterances which ought to link Lee's name with that of Washington's.

But I fear the time allotted me and the patience of my audience have more than reached the prescribed limit. Another thought or two, therefore, and I am done. Not being “native and to the manner born,” I must leave the recording of the many who have wrought wisely and well for the betterment of Fairfax County to minds better qualified and pens better driven.

And there are many such whose acts are worthy of record. Many who have passed to the silent majority and many still on the firing-line of life’s battlefield. Not, perhaps, performing great acts of heroism or deeds of daring; but by making two blades of grass grow where only one grew before; by aiding in building two miles of good roads where never one existed before; by beautifying the homes of the living, and fencing in, and tenderly caring for, the graves of the dead; by striving for a higher moral, social and educational uplift in our county and State, are acting well their part in life and well deserve our plaudits and our thanks.

And of the two great men whose lives were more or less closely identified with this county’s history, and regarding whom I have endeavored to draw a rough draft of their public lives and services; of the warp and woof of censure and success that was constantly theirs to win and to endure, what of their lives when they, too, joined the ranks of the men behind the guns?

Washington, retired to his farms at Mount

Vernon and in the "simple concerns of ordinary life," still continued to add to the advancement and prosperity of his country. He imported thoroughbred stock and improved seeds, systematized farming and was really the father of the Department of Agriculture. And his death was occasioned by devotion to duty; an early morning ride, the all-day overseeing of his farms during a dismal, rainy, December day—and, life's fitful fever long since o'er, he sleeps well; and his merits and his memory ever remain enshrined in the minds and hearts of his countrymen.

And Lee! After the eventful strife between the States had ceased, he withdrew at once from public affairs, betaking himself to the work of a simple citizen, not morosely or in sullen vexation of spirit, but manfully and with a firm conviction of duty. He frankly accepted the result and used his great influence for the restoration of friendly relations between the late warring sections, and spent the remaining years of his life as a man behind the gun—an educational gun, "teaching the young ideas how to shoot!" And, in my opinion, those years, between 1865 and 1870, were the greatest and grandest of his life. He undertook the presidency of Washington College, which had been closed during the four years of the war, and by his patience, his executive ability, his scholarly qualities, and high ideals of scholarship, backed by dignity of character and action, set a standard

of success higher than the college had ever achieved before.

During the spring of 1870, I spent a few days at Lexington, Virginia, and on the morning of the last day of my stay, attended the college chapel services, at which General Lee presided. And that scene will ever remain fixed in my memory. The antics of the most frolicsome, mischievous, boy ended for a time, as, with a hushed, a reverential silence, all eyes were fastened on the noble face and form of their president, while with dignified mien and features alight with Christian devotion, he read that chapter from Corinthians which begins: "Tho' I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal" and which ends, "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." And then followed the prayer: that the God of Peace (not the god of discord and of hate, as too many in that day still wished would reign), would, in His own good time, send peace and prosperity to our still distracted country; that He would put it into the minds and hearts of our Nation's leaders to end the conditions, worse even than war, still continuing throughout the South by reason of their plan of reconstruction: that all might soon be led to call each other brother and that "peace on earth and good will toward men" should rule our land hereafter.

I never again saw General Lee, but in 1890,

while acting as chairman of the executive committee of the Scotch-Irish Society of America, I paid a visit again to Lexington in the interests of that society, and, soon after my arrival, went to see the beautiful statue, The Recumbent Lee, the work of my friend of, now, more than forty years standing, Edward Virginius Valentine, of Richmond, Virginia. And standing there, what memories came crowding to my mind! It seemed as though the years that had passed since I saw Lee in life were but as yesterday; that the marble seemed endowed with life and that "though dead, he yet speaketh."

How grandly Valentine expressed the very thought and wish Lee would have uttered had he been asked as to the form his monument should take. Not like that of so many heroes of the past, and as one now standing in Lafayette Square, Washington, on horseback, with horse standing on the toe of one hind foot, his head higher than the rider's and decked out with the panoply of war; nor even like a warrior taking his rest with his martial-cloak around him; but, as so beautifully expressed by Bryant, in the closing lines of his *Thanatopsis*, "Soothed and sustained by an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave like one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams!"

And thus we leave him, well-knowing that a gentler, nobler, kindlier, kinglier, man never lived, and who, if standing before you today, was asked

to express in two words his ideas regarding man's true status in life, it would be “work and duty!”

Therefore I will close by reading some lines which seem to me to express both Washington's and Lee's ideals of life:

Life's every task calls loud for forceful man;  
The shirker, not the worker, mars God's perfect plan:  
'Tis only he whose work fulfills life's role  
The car of progress drives to fame's or fortune's goal.

Work well performed should be man's truest test;  
A conscience free from guile should be his soul's behest;  
Thus, doubly armed, he fears no foe or task,  
And, labor o'er, in God's approving smile will bask.

Angels of Light, aid all to do the right;  
Where duty calls for work or strife, lead thou us on;  
Tho' rough the way and dark and drear the night,  
Grant strength to do and dare; bid fear and sloth begone.

Work while 'tis day, fear not the coming night;  
For duty well performed no fortune's frost can blight;  
Tho' “Man ne'er is, but always to be, blest,”  
Act well thy part in life; then God will do the rest.

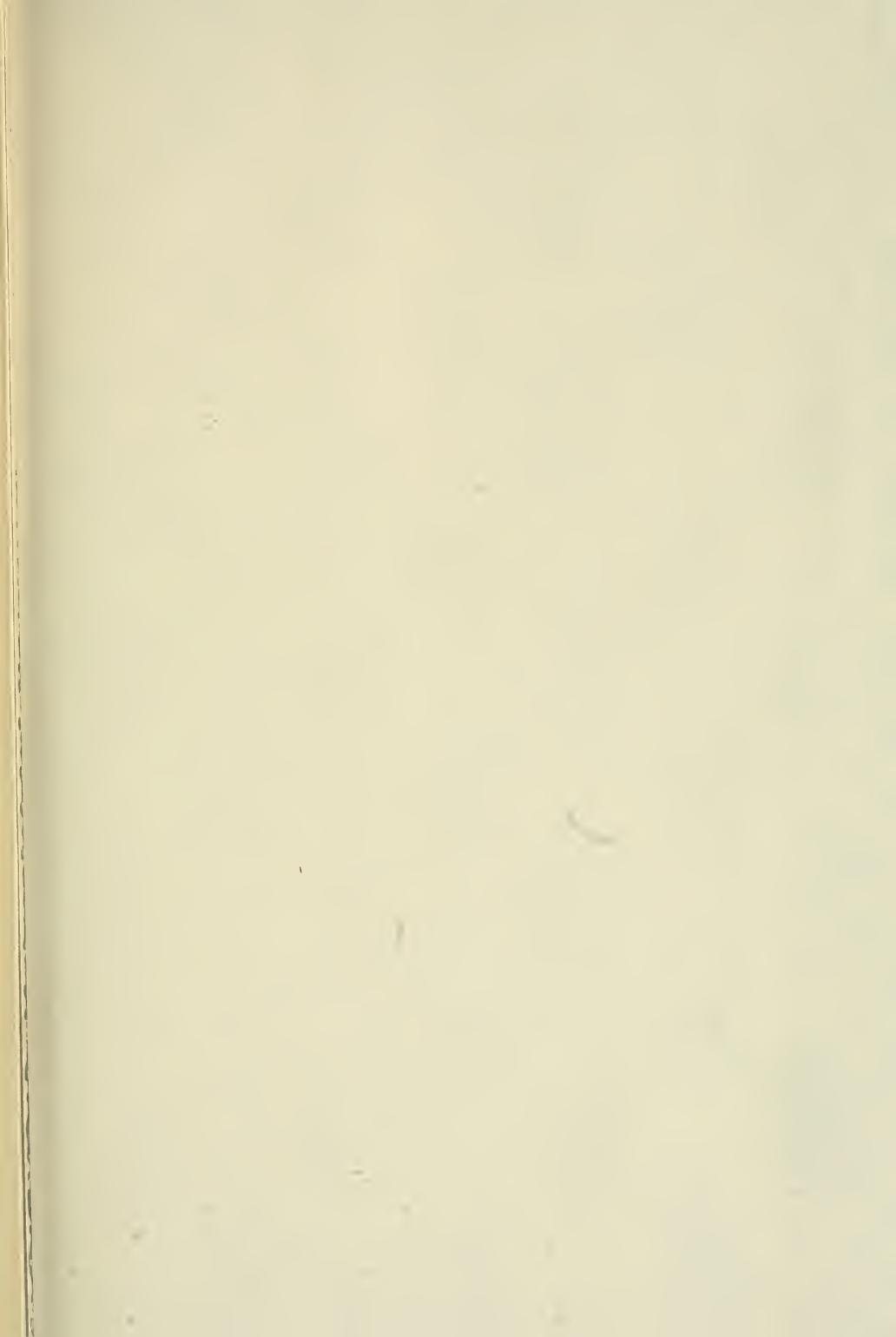














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